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Chambers's Journal

SIXTH SERIES.

SOME BOOKS IN MY LIBRARY.

By the EDITOR.

WILLIAM HAZLITT, essayist and critic, tells us that he does not think any the worse of a book for having survived a generation or two—he has more confidence in the dead than the living. My personal tastes agree with Hazlitt's; and many of my books belong to the category thus approved by lapse of time. My collections are miscellaneous; but I have always been ambitious of bringing together a complete series of works written and published by an ancestor of two generations back.

My opportunities in this direction have perhaps been more fortunate than may have been the case with other collectors. Turning to the shelves containing the works of William and Robert Chambers, one of the first volumes to catch my eye is an ancient, and inside tattered, Family Bible. Bound in stout leather, and bearing the date 1606, the book has reached me as eighth in descent from Mr James Chambers, who resided in Peebles during the seventeenth century. It contains among other early autographs that of another James Chambers, grandson of the above, who tells us that he was baptised upon the 24th day of November 1699. Then occurs the signature of his son William, born in 1730, down to William Chambers, its more recent possessor, who with his brother founded *Chambers's Journal* and the publishing house which bears their joint names.

If books could tell tales, the experience of this ancient volume during the last hundred years of life would provide much curious reading and food for reflection. After almost daily use at Peebles during two hundred years, it left the old county town early in the century to follow the shattered fortunes of its owner, the writer's great-grandfather. Saved from the final downfall of this individual, it probably passed direct into the hands of his eldest son, and witnessed in turn a successful career extending over a period of sixty years. I hope it has now found its final resting-place, and that it may always remain a valued

heirloom in the possession of the writer and his descendants.

Passing from what is no more than a family curiosity, I come to some of the earliest works written and published by the Brothers Chambers. William, in the Memoir of his brother Robert, says that, in 1820, to vary the monotony of his occupation, he had for some time been making efforts at literary composition. The result was a small volume containing an account of the Scottish Gypsies, embellished with a coarse copperplate frontispiece of what is termed 'The Fight at Lowrie's Den.' The full title of my own copy, dated 1821, is '*Exploits, Curious Anecdotes, and Sketches of the Most Remarkable Scottish Gypsies or Tinklers, together with Traits of their Origin, Character, and Manners.*' Edinburgh: Printed and sold by William Chambers, 1820.' This pamphlet, which is extremely rare, was published in paper covers, at sixpence, and seems to have gone through three editions. It may be held to represent the author's first literary and publishing venture. About this period Robert Chambers joined his brother William, and the Gypsy brochure was quickly followed by *The Kaleidoscope, or Edinburgh Amusement*, a fortnightly periodical published at threepence, which came to an end after its eighth number, in 1822. It was almost entirely written by Robert Chambers, and some of its contents are included in the author's collected works. Of this curious early periodical I am the fortunate possessor of three bound copies. Other early works of this writer also in my possession are a *Life of the Black Dwarf, or David Ritchie*, the original of the character of Elshender in *Tales of My Landlord* (printed and published in 1821); and another trifle of the same period is *Ocean Rhymes, Illustrative of the Sentiments and Songs of British Seamen*, by John Denovan, published by Robert Chambers, 1824. An interesting account of Denovan's life is given in the already-mentioned Memoir. Although no better than a porter to a tea-dealer in Leith Walk, he was always over-

flowing with allusions to Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats. A little crazy on poetical subjects, he by an easy transition became half-mad on politics, and edited a weekly periodical called *The Patriot*, desperately Radical in character. His poetical pieces were favourably noticed by Sir Walter Scott, who occasionally looked in upon him at his den in Leith Wynd, Edinburgh, where he latterly made a living by coffee-roasting, and where he died in 1827. The writer possesses a curious letter from Denovan to William Chambers, written from London in 1820.

We also learn from the same Memoir of an edition of Burns's Poems printed and sold by William Chambers; but this I have never seen, and no copy is known to Burns collectors. A well-known Edinburgh bookseller lately told me that he had searched for this book for forty years, so far without success. The publisher himself had no copy, but had been heard to say years ago that the work was bound in yellow wrappers and sold, I think, at sixpence. Seven hundred copies were done up, and these seem to have been readily sold, and thus probably read out of existence. I give this information for the benefit of Burns enthusiasts and those who frequent the bookstalls. Should a copy ever turn up, I hope the fortunate purchaser will communicate with me.

I now come to the work which perhaps of all others brought fame to its author—the well-known *Traditions of Edinburgh*. One of my valued possessions is a copy of this book in six monthly parts, and even that is but a third edition. The only real guide to a first edition of this scarce book is the absence of a note at page 80 of the first volume, referring to two previous editions. I am fortunate in owning a bound copy of this genuine first edition. The work after the issue of the first part received much encouragement from Sir Walter Scott, who supplied the author with several folio pages of closely-written material. This Scott manuscript is now before me, and so far as I know has never been printed. As any original matter from 'The Author of *Waverley*' must be of general interest, I make no excuse in quoting the following extracts. Speaking of the Buccleuch family, Scott gives some interesting notes on the first Duchess, who married the Duke of Monmouth, and, long surviving him, made a second marriage, and died in 1732. Colonel Charteris, notorious as a gamester, extortioner, and profligate, died in the same month at Stoneyhill, near Musselburgh. Scott's story runs thus:

'The Duchess of Buccleuch and Monmouth was the last lady in Scotland who had pages in the proper acceptation of the word—that is, young gentlemen of good birth who learned their formula in attending on persons of quality. The last of her attendants of this sort was a general officer; I forget his name. If a letter was delivered, the domestic gave it to the page, the page to the

waiting gentlewoman (always a lady), and she at length to the Duchess. She kept a tight hand over her clan and tenants, but was on the whole beloved. Her lameness was not so visible as your informer mentions. She was, however, plain, as appears from her portraits, one of which I have; and what is more, even Dryden, who inscribes a play to her, talks much of her wit but not a word of her beauty, which shows the case was desperate. She was supposed to have been courted by James II.; but His Majesty chose such ugly mistresses as induced his brother to say that his confessor had assigned them for penances. I never heard there was anything improper in her intimacy with the king, which certainly saved her own estate from forfeiture in the Duke of Monmouth's rebellion. She was buried on the same day with the too much celebrated Colonel Charteris. At the funeral of Henry, Duke of Buccleuch, ten or twelve years since, I was shown an old man who had been at the Duchess of Monmouth's funeral and Colonel Charteris's also. He could still walk to Edinburgh, yet must have been nearly 100 years old. He said the day was most dreadfully stormy, which all the world agreed was owing to the Devil carrying off Charteris. The mob broke in upon the mourners, and threw cats, dogs, and packs of cards upon the coffin. The gentlemen drew their swords and cut away among the rioters; and in the confusion one little man was pushed into the grave, and the sextons, who of course were somewhat rapid in the discharge of their office, began to shovel the earth in upon the quick and the dead. My grandfather by the mother's side was present, his wife, Jean Swinton of Swinton, being a cousin of the Charteris family. He was much hurt, and I have heard my mother describe the horror of the family when he came home with his clothes bloody and his sword broken.'

Again, referring to the sojourn of a well-known foreign princess in Edinburgh, Scott says: 'Princess Dashkoff made a great sensation in Edinburgh. The people have annexed our British ideas of pre-eminence to the title of princess, though on the Continent it is inferior to that of duchess. Princess Dashkoff took advantage of this mistake to take precedence of the present Duchess of Buccleuch, who, not much pleased at this breach of ceremony, determined on the next occasion to take her own rank and walk first out of the room. The Princess guessed what she was about to do, and just as they were going to move, came up to the Duchess and took hold of her familiarly, with "*Allons, ma chère Duchesse, point de cérémonie.*"'

The friendship established at this time continued until the great writer's death; and his last letter written to Robert Chambers, in which he bewails his failing health, is now in my possession, and may be found printed in full in William Chambers's Memoir of his brother.

The working library of a student and man of letters is seldom of much interest to the mere

collector of book rarities. At his death, in 1871, Robert Chambers left many hundreds of volumes; but these had in most cases been purchased in connection with his own literary labours, and, besides works of reference, consisted of ordinary standard editions. Some few of his books, however, were of more than ordinary interest and importance, the gem of the collection being a manuscript work known as *The Lyon in Mourning*, and dealing with the rising of 1745. This manuscript, which was bequeathed by him to the Advocates' Library, Edinburgh, has lately been printed *in extenso* as one of the publications of the Scottish History Society. Shortly before Dr Chambers's library was dispersed, an old and valued servant of the firm of W. & R. Chambers, now, alas! no more, happened to be at St Andrews, where Dr Chambers had built a house, and passed the last years of his life. Having at all times access to the house of his late master, my old friend found his way into the library, and no doubt from sentimental motives, and having in view the interests of myself and others, who were at that time too young to choose for themselves, he brought away with him to Edinburgh several volumes of much interest and value. Some of these are with me now, and consist of two interleaved copies of the *Traditions of Edinburgh*, one of which contains numerous holograph notes by Sir Walter Scott and Henry Mackenzie. In his preface to the last edition of the *Traditions*, Dr Chambers records how Henry Mackenzie, the venerable author of *The Man of Feeling*, who was born in the year 1745, called at his place of business, and having seen the first number of the new work, immediately offered to supply the author with further notes and information. Some of these notes are embodied in the two volumes to which I refer.

It must have been about the same period or earlier that Dr Chambers first read *Waverley*. Some years ago, and long before the present demand arose for first editions of Sir Walter Scott's works, I was myself so fortunate as to find a copy in three volumes of the very rare first edition of *Waverley*, in original binding, and published in 1814. This copy contains many manuscript notes by Robert Chambers, and in one of these he points out a curious error of the author, by which Evan Dhu Maccombich is made the foster-brother of Fergus M'Ivor, and at the same time both the chief and his sister are stated to have been born and brought up in France. I do not know if the author's attention was afterwards drawn to this contradiction. Again he writes, quoting from page 328 of the same edition, 'The courtyard was totally empty, but *Waverley* still stood there.' Was it ever, I wonder, pointed out to the author that this is a bull? The 1814 edition of Scott's first novel is now a rarity of the first water, and held in great esteem by book-collectors. It is very much scarcer

than any early edition of the author's later works, as only one thousand copies were printed, and a new edition was almost immediately required. I possess another copy of the book in the same three-volume form, the eighth edition, dated 1821.

The meeting between Scott and Robert Burns has often been described, and forms an important event in the life of the great novelist; but Scott was too young to enjoy any acquaintance with Burns's contemporary, Robert Fergusson the Scottish poet. Six years older than Burns, Fergusson was born in 1750, and died in 1774, when Walter Scott was but two years old. I need not refer here to the well-known incident of Burns's visit during his residence in Edinburgh to the tomb of Fergusson in Canongate Churchyard, Edinburgh.

In 1804 a new edition of Fergusson's poems was published in facsimile of the early octavo editions of Burns's works. My copy of this edition contains, fastened inside the boards, an envelope containing a lock of Fergusson's hair, with the following note: 'Specimen of the hair of Robert Fergusson the Scottish poet. I procured it from Miss Inverarity, grandniece of the poet. July 24, 1828.—R. CHAMBERS.' In another manuscript inserted in the volume we are told that the poet's father resided in 1765 in Warriston Close, Edinburgh, where, as it happens, the printing office of Messrs W. & R. Chambers was established early in the century, and remains at the present time.

I may conclude these desultory remarks with a notice of two other eighteenth-century works in my collection. Both are very scarce, and their possession would well repay a search by frequenters of the bookstall and saleroom.

Allan Ramsay is best known by his pastoral poem, *The Gentle Shepherd*; but five years earlier he published his miscellaneous poems. My copy, which is a crown octavo, in original leather binding, bears the title, '*Poems by Allan Ramsay*. Edinburgh: Printed for the Author at The Mercury, opposite to Niddry's Wynd, 1720,' and has no less than six different title-pages. This work may originally have been published in parts. The locality containing Allan Ramsay's first printing-office existed until 1785, when it was removed, with other ancient wynds and closes, to make room for the buildings at the entrance to the South Bridge, Edinburgh. It is referred to in the other work under notice, *The Directory for the City of Edinburgh, 1774*. This is a small octavo, 'Printed by P. Williamson, and sold at his general penny post-office, Luckenbooths, Edinburgh.' The work contains about four thousand seven hundred entries, and concludes with the following advertisement: 'The publisher continues to print advertisements, shop bills, &c., upon his new invented Military and Maritime Printing press. Those who choose to employ him in the printing line may depend upon having their work well done, and soon done, and at moderate rates. Likewise are published the Psalms of David in

meter, upon a very small scale, price 6d. in sheets, and when bound may be transported in an ordinary snuff-box.'

In a second article I may perhaps describe some contents of my library of a later date, and

entirely different in character from those early Edinburgh publications so closely interwoven with the history of my own family both as authors and publishers of popular literature.

C. E. S. CHAMBERS.

OUR LADY OF DELIVERANCE.

CHAPTER XXVIII.—THE BEGINNING OF THE END.



HERE now came a busy time for all of us. The house seemed never free from visitors, who flocked in to tender their congratulations and to see with their own eyes and hear with their own ears the principal actors in this dramatic little episode of real life: old friends of the family, who vowed they had never for one moment believed the insinuations against Gaston; officers and officials of all degrees, who came out of pure good-fellowship and curiosity; press-men and artists, who came out of curiosity alone; and to every one it was necessary to be as polite and informatory as one's weariness of it all permitted. Among our first callers was the Abbé Dieufoy. After congratulating Gaston, he took snuff very elegantly and regarded Denise and myself with his head whimsically on one side as though appraising us.

'Monsieur Lamont,' he said at length, 'you have picked up the French language with extraordinary rapidity.'

'I have had an excellent teacher, monsieur,' I said.

'All the same,' he said, with half-a-dozen knowing nods, 'your progress has been most remarkable.'

'I found him a most apt pupil, Monsieur l'Abbé,' laughed Denise.

'He does you infinite credit, madame,' said the abbé.

'And Madame the Duchesse de St Ouen?' I asked.

'She is well, but has hardly yet recovered from her disappointment in connection with certain events. However,' he said, with a gentle shrug, 'it is not possible for every one to be satisfied in this world. If I may judge by appearances, madame's disappointment is not shared in certain other quarters; and if the happiness of the greater number has resulted—*que voulez-vous?*'

Monsieur l'Abbé looked as if he would have liked, as the spiritual adviser of the family of Des Comptes, to enter into other questions; but fresh visitors came in, and those questions were not put, and never have been put.

Gaston presented himself at the office of the Minister of War next morning by special command, and was received by that functionary with impressive cordiality; later in the day he

was received in like manner by the President himself.

Then, in due course, he was brought before another court-martial, which formally reversed the decision of the original one, pronounced him guiltless of the charges on which he had previously been condemned, restored him therefore to the position he was in before the trial, and left it to the authorities to make such reparation as they deemed advisable for the undeserved suffering and obloquy which had been placed upon him by Lepard's treachery.

What form such reparation would take had been a matter of much debate in the papers, and many wild suggestions had been made. I cannot deny that Denise and myself had also discussed the matter between ourselves; for of the righteousness of such reparation there could be no question, and I must confess that I could not rise to the full height of the *Des Comptes'* sense of honour and dignity when my wife stoutly asserted that Gaston would accept nothing.

But when it came to the point, that was the position which he quietly took up. Many offers were made to him, we knew, though he never discussed them with us. But he would have none of them. Finally, under extreme pressure, and simply as the official *cachet* of his complete rehabilitation by his chiefs, he accepted a double step and became the youngest colonel in the army. But, incidentally, the high stand he took in this whole matter wrought powerfully on his future. He was accepted everywhere, inside official circles and outside, as a man whose honour was beyond question and whose absolute trustworthiness none might dispute, and his subsequent rise was rapid. He was general of division at thirty-five, and has not yet reached the full height of advancement.

Lepard had arrived before us. His voyaging had not been so leisurely as ours. Report said that from the moment he came into the hands of the authorities out in Noumea he had been under the strictest surveillance day and night, but that he had never uttered one single word. In my own mind I came to wonder if, by some strange dispensation, he had not been stricken dumb; for it seemed incredible that simply of his own strong will he should have maintained so absolute a silence for so long a time.

Vaurel had been examined as to his knowledge

of the murder, and in the result Louis Vard, Père Goliot, and Juliet the gendarme were summoned to Paris as witnesses; and Monsieur l'Abbé Dieufoy was thrown into a state of considerable perturbation by being also called to the trial.

The court-martial was not open to the public. The result only was made known. Lepard was degraded and dismissed from the army, and was then handed over to the civil power to be tried for the murder of Captain Zuyler; and that trial I attended. Gaston declined to go near the place. Denise, of course, kept clear of the whole matter, though her interest in it was intense.

Lepard, as he sat in civilian dress between two stalwart gendarmes in the well of the court, was the unpleasing objective of all eyes. He was thinner than when I saw him last, and the hair had been allowed to grow on his face, which was set in a black scowl, like a cast-iron mask.

He sat with folded arms, gazing stolidly in front of him; and as I looked at him the idea grew upon me that the dumb fiend which he had invoked at the first for our frustration had, in course of time, taken complete possession of him, and held him now in thrall, mind, body, and soul. Why he had not long since made away with himself, whenever he saw the game was lost, I could only set down to the fact that the watch had been so rigid that no possible chance had been left to him.

The official procedure, which differed so greatly from that of our English courts, interested me greatly; but the direct conversational methods employed by the judge to the prisoner failed to impress me, more especially since they were productive of no results.

The case against the prisoner was developed rapidly by the Public Prosecutor.

Prudent Vaurel was called, and detailed the conversation between Lepard and Zuyler under the tree in which he had sat watching for Roussel. He described the actual facts of the murder as he saw them, and of his own arrest by Juliet, and his subsequent release on Lepard's assertion that it was Roussel who struck down Zuyler.

The Abbé Dieufoy described his meeting with Lepard, and the latter's confident assertion that Roussel was the murderer.

Louis Vard and old Goliot—the latter in a state of abject limpness at being so far removed from his ordinary round of life—proved the fact of Roussel's presence near the station many miles away from the Château at the very time the tragedy was enacting.

The Court had accorded the prisoner counsel; but it might have saved itself the trouble. Prisoner took no notice.

Even when Vaurel dramatically described the actual murder and the self-inflicted wounds of the murderer, and his dabbling himself with his victim's blood, he showed not the slightest interest. I am convinced his brain had given way, or, as

I have said, had surrendered itself into the keeping of the dumb demon.

The end came swift and sudden, while the judge was haranguing him somewhat heatedly with a view to rouse him from his stubborn silence. I was watching Lepard intently. I could not help it. He fascinated me. Suddenly I saw the black face suffuse with blood. Gray-black one moment, the next it was black-red, and the next moment, with his arms still folded, he fell crashing forward against the front of his enclosure and lay still.

The gendarmes, who had come to expect no movement from him, grabbed him convulsively and hauled him up; but his head hung limply on his chest, and his face was dabbled with blood—his own this time; and presently one of them looked up at the startled judge, and said, '*Mon dieu, monsieur, he is dead!*'

And dead he was. At first they could not make out how he died. 'By the visitation of God' was the favourite theory, though why such merciful visitation should have been vouchsafed to so great a scoundrel just when most he needed it seemed hard to reconcile with one's elementary ideas of justice.

But the doctors soon put another and simpler aspect on the matter. He was a bull-necked man, with a predisposition to apoplexy. Wedged tight in his throat they found a plug of black cloth torn from the lining of his coat, which he had evidently kept in his mouth with this end in view, and had swallowed when he considered it time to go.

It had choked him as effectually as a garrotte. The convulsion had burst a blood-vessel in the brain, and he died as he had intended.

The Court broke up in confusion, and we all streamed out wondering, and then by degrees the truth was made known to us.

In due course Vaurel received his one hundred thousand francs. He asked me rather shamefacedly if we thought he ought to take them, seeing that Monsieur Gaston would take nothing of all they wanted to give him. But Denise satisfied him that the cases were quite different, and none knew better than I how thoroughly well he deserved his reward. So, without more compunction, he took it, and went back home to Cour-des-Comptes a wealthy man.

He insisted on showing Louis Vard and Père Goliot something of Paris before they returned to Brittany; and in four days he had reduced the old man to a state of crazy bewilderment at the many strange and wonderful sights he had seen, while Louis Vard had finally made up his mind that he had so far been wasting his life in Cour-des-Comptes, and that the only place in the world for an enterprising young man was Paris.

When he returned temporarily to Brittany he carried with him my promise to hand Jeanne Thibaud the marriage portion which I had promised her that night in my room at her mother's

house, on condition that the marriage took place within a month of that day.

For the best of reasons I could not fulfil my promise of dancing with mademoiselle at her wedding; but we promised to be there in any event, and Louis departed in a state of eager anticipation to arrange matters quietly with Madame Thibaud and to hurry on the happy day.

We went to the station to see our friends off, and Vaurel insisted on taking all three down first-class. For Boulot, handsomely arrayed in a new brass collar bristling with blunt spikes, and looking horribly ferocious, sat between his master's legs in spite of official regulations, and grinned superciliously at the functionaries who intimated from time to time that his proper place was in the dog-box forward.

A fortnight later we followed: Denise, Gaston, and I. We journeyed by easy stages, stopping one night at Rennes, where black-browed Marie of the Hôtel Jullien smilingly taxed me with leaving an unpaid bill and certain articles of luggage, both of which impeachments were true, but I had never once given either a thought since last I was there. When I explained to her the reasons for my oversight, and she learned that the gentleman with me was the Colonel Gaston des Comptes about whom the whole world was ringing, and that his sister was my wife, she permitted me to pay up arrears, and for the sake of my 'beautiful eyes' and my 'winsome leddie' took me into favour again.

When we reached Cour-des-Comptes next day the whole village, headed by Boulot and Vaurel

and Louis Vard, met us at the station, and would, I think, have dragged the carriage all the way to the Château, but that we feared for the springs, and preferred the less trying traction of the fat old horses.

Père Bonnatt was there too from Combours, for I had written to him begging him to come over and assist at the wedding, and the good-humour and jollity of his face were in themselves sufficient to ensure a right jovial time.

He stayed with us at the Château, and proved a very pleasant addition to our party. I can see again the merry twinkle of his black eyes as he was introduced by me to Denise.

'Yes,' he said, 'this is the young lady I meant. I see you met her at the station that day all right. I was afraid you had taken advantage of my indiscreet remark when I learned of her disappearance a week later.'

'How did the Duchesse take it?' asked Denise; 'and poor Sister Cécile?'

'Ah, Sister Cécile! I believe she did have a succession of rather bad quarters of an hour. In fact, I am not sure that she has entirely finished with them yet.'

'Oh, that is too bad!' cried Denise. 'Can we do nothing for her?'

'Why, yes! Send her a present in money, which she will immediately hand over to the Duchesse, who will at once admit her to favour again, and peace and happiness will reign in the dovecot once more.'

'It shall be done at once,' said Denise. 'Poor Sister Cécile!'

OPTICIANS AND THEIR TRADE.



HE optical trade is probably one of the most conservative industries in the world; and, while nearly every other class of trader has kept well abreast with the times, the optician, for some inscrutable reason, is not only content to follow in the footsteps of his forefathers, but glories in his exclusiveness.

The secrets of the trade have hitherto been fairly well kept; and many of the particulars we have obtained from a competent authority are therefore the more interesting.

In the first place, there is the oft-debated question as to the why and wherefore of the superiority of 'pebbles' or quartz over ordinary glass for spectacles. It will probably surprise most of our readers to learn that there is no superiority whatsoever. The pebble myth is one that has been gently but persistently nurtured by the optician for scores of years, the object being, of course, the extra profit. A pair of pebble lenses costs the retailer from one shilling and sixpence to two shillings and sixpence; and

the selling price ranges for a pair of steel-framed spectacles or *pince-nez* glazed with this material, from five shillings to one and a half guineas according to the location and conscience of the vendor. A pair of lenses moulded from ordinary glass is, on the other hand, supplied by the wholesaler at one penny or twopence; and even the most exalted Bond Street optician would hesitate before demanding for them when mounted in steel frames more than fifteen shillings. The same article may, on the other hand, be vended in a less aristocratic neighbourhood at as low a figure as one shilling.

This brings us to the question of the divergence in prices of spectacles. The uninitiated may think that a pair of spectacles sold in Bond Street or Piccadilly for fifteen shillings must possess immeasurably superior optical properties to a pair bought at a suburban jeweller's for, say, one shilling. Nothing of the kind. The only probable difference is in the workmanship and strength of the steel frame; and, granted that the adjustment to sight in each case is

correct, one pair is, for visual purposes, quite equal to the other.

It must not, however, be inferred from the foregoing observations that we recommend our visually defective readers, whose sight has not been properly tested, to fly for their glasses to the cheapest spectacle-vendor. It is a fact, however, that, granted that a would-be wearer of artificial aids to vision is suited with proper prescription, it matters not, for ultimate results, whether he pays a shilling or five guineas for his 'specs.'

All the ordinary lenses for long or short sight are stocked by the retail optician, and numbered, just as a 'ready-made' bootmaker keeps on his shelves the various sizes of boots and shoes. On the other hand, there are many abnormalities of vision requiring lenses ground to special 'curves.' In these instances the order and prescription have to be transmitted by the retail optician to the glass-grinder, of whom there are perhaps not more than half-a-dozen in the whole of London. The methods of spectacle lens-grinding by these few firms hardly differ in principle, or in a single detail; it is obvious, therefore, that one retail optician is as good as another for supplying spectacles, even of special make.

There are only one or two retail opticians in the whole country who grind their own special lenses. These firms make a point of refusing to supply any one unless furnished with a hospital or oculist's prescription—in other words, they decline to test their customers' eyesight. This is diplomatic, for the oculist, always jealous of the slightest poaching upon his preserves, appreciates the attitude of these firms, with the result that they receive more 'prescription work' than all the other London opticians put together.

It is a curious characteristic of some retail opticians that they have from time immemorial, by words expressed or implied, conveyed to cus-

tomers the impression that the instruments stocked by them are of their own manufacture. This may be due to the desire to conceal the fact that at least nine-tenths of the spectacles, opera-glasses, and telescopes sold in this country are of foreign origin. France and Germany absorb nearly the whole of this trade. The Merchandise Marks Act came as a sad blow to the retail optician. He is debarred now from placing his name upon the instruments he sells, and it will be observed that those firms not caring to risk a Board of Trade prosecution are careful to put the words, in minute letters, 'Examined by' in front of their name engraved upon their opera-glasses, &c.

A few years ago the lenses of nearly every opera-glass sold in this country were manufactured abroad. Recently, however, some London firms have devoted themselves to this class of work; but the prices are far in excess of those of the best French and German make, and these, indeed, leave very little to be desired.

There are one or two departments only in optics where we hold our own with the foreigner. In the construction of microscopes, photographic lenses, and astronomical telescopes our own manufacturing opticians are not to be excelled, and scarcely equalled. In all these instruments superlative care and nicety of adjustment, together with perfection of finish, are a *sine qua non*, and here our own manufacturers hold the palm.

It is a remarkable fact that, although the value of raw optical glass ground into photographic, telescope, and microscope lenses runs into many thousands of pounds per annum, its manufacture in this country has always remained in the hands of a firm of lighthouse lens manufacturers in Birmingham, who, it is well known, have made a gigantic fortune out of this branch of their business alone.

STEPHEN WHITLEGE'S REVENGE.

IN FOUR CHAPTERS.—CHAPTER II.



TWELVE years had passed since that memorable afternoon when the heir of the ancient house of Carlsbridge engaged in such heroic battle for his Queen. Twelve years form no inconsiderable portion of a human lifetime, and it is quite possible for such a period to make vital changes in that seemingly unchangeable thing, a Wiltshire village. Lord Carlsbridge was still alive, but he was more of a recluse than ever. Old Squire Donningford was dead, and had been succeeded by his son, a gentleman of a saving turn of mind, who gave up the kennels, sold his father's shorthorns, and closed the path through the blackthorn copse at

the foot of the Downs—which last act was sufficient to ruin him in the eyes of the village for ever and a day. At the Vicarage there was a small yet perceptible change. The vicar was older and grayer than of yore, more given to dozing before his study fire than he had once been, and more prone to leave the conduct of the parish to the long-legged, cadaverous curate, who had his own theories, and fell foul of his vicar in consequence on every possible occasion. The most important change in that household, however, was to be found in the vicar's daughter, Mildred. Twelve years before, on a certain memorable occasion, as already described, we met her as a girl of twelve. She had doubled that age now,

and the added years had produced a tall, handsome woman, who was, at one and the same time, the hope and the despair of the youths for miles around. If offers of marriage count for anything, then the last six years had been busy ones for her. She was a universal favourite, and was as welcome in Lady Carlsbridge's drawing-room as in the cottage parlour of the humblest old woman in the village. Each was certain that she would marry, and each felt equally convinced that the man who won her hand might consider himself fortunate above his fellows. But who would that man be? There was young Squire Todthorpe, who astonished the neighbourhood by forsaking his usual pursuits and attending church on five consecutive Sundays, a thing he was never known to have done before. His conduct, however, was explained when one wet Sunday night he waited for her at the church door, proposed before he reached the lich-gate, and when he discovered that his suit was hopeless, went home to his dogs and badgers, vowing that happiness had gone out of life for him for ever. Then there was the Reverend Algernon Snowfield, the curate aforesaid, whose bride had been the Church until he had looked into Mildred's gray eyes. After a period of hesitation, to which he dared not give the name of courtship, he put his fate to the touch, and was rejected in consequence. To the names of these two unfortunate gentlemen might be added those of the doctor's assistant; the organist; the head-master of the village school, who loved from afar, and trembled when he spoke to her; and last, but not least, Stephen Whitledge the younger, now a tall and stalwart man. Stephen's wooing, however, differed from that of the others inasmuch as there was no humility connected with it. On his father's death he had succeeded to the mill, and in consequence was now one of the magnates of the village. He had the reputation of being a hard man to cross, and it was stated that when he set his mind upon doing or having a thing he was usually successful in accomplishing or obtaining it. Earlier in his career he had made up his mind that he would remain a bachelor, being of the opinion that a wife would in some measure prevent him from so speedily garnering that wealth upon which he had so inordinately set his heart. In consequence he engaged a village crone as housekeeper, and banished the fair sex from his heart, as he thought, for ever. But there came a time, as happens in the lives of most men, when he found that it was not good to live alone. In other words, Mildred Garret had returned from a somewhat lengthy visit to London, and he realised that she was not the same Mildred he had known as a boy, but a vastly superior person, even worthy of being the helpmate of a miller in a sound way of business. But he was not going to do anything in a hurry. He resolved to take three months to think it over; then, if at the

end of that time he found himself still of the same opinion, he would take the bull by the horns and make her his wife without further ado. In pursuance of this plan he indulged in dreams of the future. Mildred, so he settled it, would of course understand that she was an extremely lucky girl. In return for his condescension she would make his home pleasant and comfortable to him. He would do the mill-house up a bit; he would even revive the vanished glory of the drawing-room; Mildred should be a power in the parish, and perhaps, if she pleased him, his generosity might run as far as a pony-carriage—which, by the way, he would take as a set-off against a bad debt. Surely human ambition could require no more.

With that hard-headedness characteristic of him, he gave the matter due consideration for three months, and at the end of that period, finding that he was still in favour of the proposal, made up his mind to put the question to the girl herself without further loss of time. Eventually he decided upon the Sunday evening following as being the most suitable. He would wait for her after service, and have it all settled and done with before supper-time should arrive.

The Sunday evening at length came round, and, for perhaps the first time in his life, Stephen Whitledge bestowed careful attention upon the question of what he should wear. He had a dim notion that maids attach some importance to a man's personal appearance, and, like a prudent business man, he resolved to run no risks. When all was finished to his satisfaction, he left the mill, crossed the bridge, and made his way down the little village street towards the church. It was not often that he attended the evening service, so that when he entered the building and passed up the aisle to his own pew, and folk noticed his brave apparel, a stare of astonishment ran through the church. It was known that Stephen did nothing without good and sufficient cause; in that case, what could his reason be now? Presently Mildred entered the building and passed into the pew on the left-hand side of the aisle, exactly opposite that occupied by the miller. She was wearing the new gray dress her aunt in London had given her, and looked surpassingly sweet. Stephen glanced at her out of the corner of his eye, and as he did so a vague fear, occasioned by he knew not what, took possession of him. He watched the pretty head bowed in prayer, the light from the oil lamp above, meanwhile, shining upon her brown tresses. He noticed the smallness of the gray-gloved hands, and the two links of a gold chain-bracelet that peeped from beneath her sleeve. Mildred, when he thought of her in his own house, was one person; Mildred dressed like this was quite another. The service had not yet commenced, and while he waited his thoughts went back to the time when Mildred and he had played to-

gether. A flush mantled his face as he thought of that day when he and Victor Benfield had fought on the Down, and his teeth clenched and his face set hard as the recollection of what he had seen on the Lovers' Seat occurred to him. God help the man who should dare to come between himself and Mildred now! Then the vicar entered and the service commenced. During the sermon, which was an eminently scholarly one, and miles above the heads of the congregation, the miller amused himself preparing for what was to take place afterwards. He scarcely knew how to frame his declaration. Being aware of his own vast superiority in the matter of wealth, he had no desire to cheapen himself; at the same time he was anxious to avoid frightening Mildred by alluding to the responsibilities she would incur as his wife. The trouble of it all was, that he was convinced that on such occasions girls require love-speeches and other 'twaddle' of that kind. Now, he himself was about as sensible a man as ever stepped, and about as capable of making love as he was of standing on his head in the village street. Still, if such a thing were absolutely necessary, he had no doubt that he could pass through the ordeal as satisfactorily as any other man. He wished now, however, that he had read up a few books upon the subject. Novels, he had heard, were full of love-talk, and perhaps he might have been able to get by heart something applicable to his own case. On one thing, however, he was quite determined: he would eschew poetry. Nothing under the sun should induce him to drop into that. He despised poets as much as he did Frenchmen, and was wont to describe both as 'sickly twuds' (toads). He, Stephen Whitledge, was a man, and was resolved to behave as one.

The service at an end, he carefully brushed his hat, prolonging the operation until he had seen Mildred leave her pew and cross the church towards the side-door; then he set off in pursuit.

It was a beautiful evening, and though just upon eight o'clock, still quite light. The rooks were cawing drowsily in the elms beyond the Vicarage garden, and in the distance could be heard the splashing of his own mill-wheel as if to encourage him in his endeavour.

'Good-evening, Miss Mildred,' he said, raising his hat as he spoke with more than usual politeness. 'We'm in for a spell of fine weather, I'm thinking.'

A moment later he could have bitten his tongue off for allowing himself to drop into dialect. To make matters worse, he corrected himself, and the smile he saw upon Mildred's face told him that she had noticed the slip.

'Yes, I think the weather does look a little more settled,' she replied, looking round the sky. Then as they moved towards the gate opening into the Vicarage garden, she added, 'Are you coming in to see papa?'

Not being prepared to begin quite so soon, Stephen allowed the opportunity to pass him, and weakly said that such was his intention. He held the gate open for her, and they passed in together.

'I suppose you enjoyed yourself in London,' he said, choosing his words carefully, lest by any chance he might let fall a provincialism again. 'Perhaps you would like to live in London always?'

He had an idea that by saying this he would induce her to commit herself to a statement that life in her own village must of necessity be preferable to existence elsewhere. Let her do that, he argued, and he thought he saw his way.

'But I wasn't in London,' she answered. 'My aunt lives in the suburbs. Twickenham is really almost like the country.'

Stephen's London geography was somewhat crude; but, on the strength of having paid three or four business visits there, he had the reputation in the village of knowing the City intimately. For this reason he was not going to admit his ignorance of Twickenham. He saw, however, that it was hopeless to attempt to reach the lady's heart by way of the great Metropolis.

'Well, 'tis certain that we are all very pleased to see you at home again,' he said graciously. 'You will think of settling down now, I suppose?'

'I suppose so,' she said, with what was almost a sigh. 'It will be fearfully dull, however.'

This did not look hopeful for what he had to say; nevertheless he was resolved to persevere.

'Now I come to think of it,' he began, as if an idea had just occurred to him, 'I think I have heard you say that the old mill is a nice, homely—picturesque, I mean—sort of place; ivy all over the front, you know, and the red brick and white windows. I mind your—I mean I remember—your telling Squire Trowbridge's lady that it would make a pretty water-colour sketch.'

'I am quite sure it would,' she answered, wondering to what all this was leading. 'We are all agreed that it is the prettiest house in the village.'

Stephen smiled approval. Things seemed to be shaping themselves satisfactorily after all.

'I am glad to hear you say that,' he answered cheerily, 'because it's about the old mill-house I've come to talk to you.'

'To talk with me?' she repeated. 'What on earth have I to do with the mill-house?'

'I want you to come and look after it for me,' he answered. 'I always used to say I shouldn't marry; but there, the fact is I've changed my mind now. It's all along of your going to London. If you hadn't agone it 'ud never come into my head. But there, the long and the short of it is that—well—if you feel like getting married, I'm willing to do the same. I've set by a tidy bit of money, and'—

Mildred gave a little cry of surprise and consternation. In her wildest dreams the probability of a proposal from Stephen Whitledge had never occurred to her. She knew that the man was in earnest, however; and, from her knowledge of his character, she was aware that he was not to be trifled with. She had received offers of marriage before, but never one that promised such difficulties as this.

'You don't know what a lucky girl you be,' Stephen continued doggedly, dropping back into dialect now that the point was settled. Then, feeling that he was giving himself away too cheaply, he changed his tone. 'I don't say but what I might have married money,' he went on. 'There's Widow Bell now, over at Green's Farm yonder, would be glad of the chance.'

He paused to see the effect of his words.

'I am very glad to hear that,' Mildred replied, clutching frantically at the straw held out to her. 'Please do not lose any time in proposing to her. I couldn't marry you—really, I couldn't.'

'What?' cried Stephen in amazement. 'What's that you say? Not marry me—me, the miller with ten thousand pounds at the bank! You can't play with me, mind that!'

'I am not playing with you,' the girl replied, with some asperity. 'I am only saying that I cannot marry you.'

Stephen's eyes began to glisten with angry fire. He was not accustomed to being thwarted, and he had looked upon the matter as settled.

'You're going to be my wife, so let there be no more talk about it,' he said stolidly. 'I know what I want, and nobody ever crosses me.'

'I will not be your wife,' she answered; 'and if you are going to talk like that you had better go away.'

At that moment the sound of voices beyond the hedge reached them. Mildred uttered a little cry as she listened. Then the gate opened, and the vicar, accompanied by a tall, handsome man, entered the garden and stood before them.

'Mildred dear, I have a great surprise to announce to you,' said the vicar. 'Captain Benfield has returned from India, and seeing me in the churchyard, asked that he might accompany me to pay his respects to you.'

'Have you forgotten me, Mildred?' inquired the new-comer, stepping forward and holding out his hand. 'I assure you I have not forgotten my old playfellow.'

Mildred tried to speak, but for a moment her voice failed her. Then she stammered out, 'No; of course I have not forgotten you.'

She looked up at the tanned face before her, adorned with a fierce moustache, and could scarcely believe that this was the same individual who had danced with her three times at the famous ball at Carlsbridge Park five years before. But since then he had been with his regiment in India and in the Soudan. In those days he was

only a subaltern, newly joined; now he was a captain, and, if report spoke the truth, on the threshold of a fine military career.

'This is a delightful surprise,' said the vicar for the second time. 'But, dear me! I am forgetting my manners. You remember Mr Whitledge—do you not?'

'Of course I remember him,' Victor answered, stepping forward and holding out his hand. 'How do you do, Stephen? It seems only yesterday that we were boys together. Like myself, you have changed a great deal since then.'

Stephen said something in reply, and then they adjourned to the house. The miller's heart was beating within him. His suit had been rejected, and by a girl he could have broken between his finger and thumb. He, Stephen Whitledge, the rich miller, the man whose word was as law to some eighteen or twenty people, to receive such a rebuff from a starveling parson's daughter! It was too much! It was unheard of! He would have shaken the dust of the place off his feet at that moment but for the fact that the vicar asked him to accompany him to his study for a few minutes in order that he might consult him on a matter connected with the welfare of the parish. The welfare of the parish, forsooth!—when his own happiness had been spoilt for ever. As it happened, the interview lasted somewhat longer than was expected, and when the pair left the vicar's sanctum for the drawing-room it was discovered that the other couple were not in the house.

'It is so warm inside,' said the clergyman; 'perhaps they have passed into the garden. Shall we follow them?'

After some little search the others were discovered on the lawn near the gate. The Captain's arm was resting on the back of the seat behind Mildred, and Stephen was irresistibly reminded of a picture that had been presented to him on that memorable day when Victor had thrashed him for speaking disrespectfully of the Queen. The thought was gall and wormwood to him, and without more ado he bade the vicar a hasty good-night and left the garden.

Four weeks later the engagement of Captain the Honourable Victor Horatio Benfield to Mildred Garret, only daughter of the Reverend George Garret, was duly announced. Those who were privileged to know spoke of it as an attachment that had existed for many years, and even Lady Carlsbridge, who had entertained more ambitious views for her beloved son, knowing Mildred's worth, could not but signify her approval of the match. To Stephen Whitledge the news came as a thunder-clap. His overwhelming self-conceit had prevented him from imagining that Mildred could prefer another to himself. Such a thing seemed incomprehensible; but it did not prevent him from hating his more successful rival with a passion that enveloped his

whole being. He brooded over it by day, and dreamt of it by night, until it exercised an influence on his whole life; yet so silently did the fire burn within that no one had any idea of the crisis through which he was passing.

One day, a week or so after the publication of the news, Victor was riding through the village on his way to the Vicarage, when he spied the miller crossing the road in front of him. On reaching him, he pulled up and leant forward in his saddle to shake hands.

'I haven't seen anything of you lately,' he said. 'By the way, Stephen, you haven't congratulated me on my engagement.'

Stephen looked at him with unflinching eyes.

'No, I don't know as I have,' he answered. 'It didn't strike me as you'd care about it. When big folks marry, they might think it impudence of smaller folk bothering about what isn't their concern.'

'What nonsense!' said Victor, with a laugh. 'Besides, you are no end of a swell in this place, they tell me: churchwarden and all that sort of thing. You'll be wanting to get married yourself before very long.'

Stephen gathered from this that Mildred had said nothing to her lover about his own proposal. He was glad of that.

'Married,' he said scornfully; 'you'll see me in the lunatic asylum first.'

'That's the way you look at it,' said Victor cheerily. 'Well, well, every man has a right to his own opinion, I suppose. But that isn't what I wanted to say. I am going to shoot over Green's Farm on Thursday. I should be very glad if you would accompany me—that is, if you care about it. They tell me there are plenty of birds this year. What do you say?'

'I can't come,' said Stephen ungraciously. 'I've got my business to look after. A man who wants to get on can't go running about the country-side with a gun in his hand, that's certain.'

'I'm sorry you can't see your way,' Victor replied, resolved not to be put out by the other's rudeness. 'However, you'll perhaps be able to manage a day later on. Good-day.'

'Good-day,' said Stephen, and continued his walk towards the mill, while Victor rode on to the Vicarage.

'Poor old Stephen,' he said to himself as he jogged along; 'he laughs at marriage—does he? What he wants is a sweet girl like Mildred to love him and bring him to a proper way of thinking.'

Though he did not know it, that was exactly what Stephen *did* want.

A RARITY AT THE ZOO.

By F. E. BEDDARD, M.A., F.R.S.



TWO small creatures have just taken up their quarters at the Zoological Gardens for the first time in the long period of seventy-four years which have elapsed since the opening of the Gardens. Madagascar produces many strange and anomalous beasts, but none to which these epithets apply more stringently than to the subject of the following remarks.

The tenrec, tondrac, or tanrec, as the animal is variously named in the vernacular, is a small creature of the hedgehog kind, and is one of the most characteristic animals inhabiting the great island of Madagascar. That island is infested with mammals which occur nowhere else, and mammals, moreover, that ought, so to speak, to have effaced themselves from creation long since. It is a bit of the old world which was sent adrift from Africa epochs ago, carrying with it as in an ark examples of the creatures which then probably populated the world generally. No obvious kind of African beast can now be found in the forests or among the marshes of Madagascar. Neither the rhinoceros nor the elephant has ever set foot there; we find no monkeys, lions, or leopards. The hippopotamus tried living there for a little while; but it soon decayed, and left merely some bones in a marsh or two.

These insectivora, as the group which contains our tenrec is called, are a race of small insect-feeding creatures which present many archaic features in their architecture. Possibly they owe their existence as a relic of the past to their smallness and unaggressiveness, to a nocturnal habit, to a general shrinking from the observation of larger and stronger quadrupeds and hawks, and also to the fact that they largely feed upon the ubiquitous and abundant earthworm. With these positive advantages, it is not remarkable that they have been able to hold their own. It is a singular fact that so many insectivores are more or less spiny, which is in its way a protection at least from prowling carnivora of moderate size; but whether this is so or not, the tenrec appears to have a better method of circumventing its foes. It has, at the most, stiff hair, which hardly reaches the dignity of spines. However, it is abundantly clear that the tenrec's forebears had a hedgehog-like coat, since the young tenrec at birth and for some time after has three lines of spines down its back, which ultimately drop off and are replaced by simple hairs. The tenrec has adopted as a permanency a state of spinelessness which is only known as an exceptional condition in the hedgehog; spineless and merely hairy

examples of that well-known animal having from time to time been met with in nature and recorded.

The tenrec is about the size of a cat, and looks like a largish hairy hedgehog. It has a long and inquisitive snout, and a tail so abbreviated as not to be apparent when the animal is in the flesh; and it walks in an ancient way upon the soles of its feet. 'They grunt,' said Buffon, 'and wallow in the mire like hogs.' This description would appear to be a presumed necessary corollary from the supposed hoggish nature of the beast; but, like its relative the hedgehog, it has not the faintest resemblance to the 'unclean beast,' except indeed that, according to the not over-particular native, its flesh is appetising. The method of walking with a foot firmly set on the ground, firm even to splayness, was in early times the fashion among all beasts; the raising of the heel and the digital mode of progression is a later invention of nature. The sharp and few cusped teeth of this little animal is also a relic of past ages, during which the elaborately-cusped

and complicated molars of later animals were unknown.

Though insignificant enough in appearance, the tenrec's persistence is highly significant of the usefulness of a dwarfish stature. Roughly speaking, no large creature can hold its own for a very long time. It is too expensive a matter to keep up a huge body where there are many rivals. The tenrec cannot be said to owe anything to intellect. Many animals have increased and multiplied by reason of their well-folded brains. The group to which the tenrec belongs have quite smooth brains. If, therefore, it had entered into competition—say, with the clever cat—the tenrec and its kindred generally would have been swept away long ago by sheer force of mind. Grubbing in a humble way for earthworms, varied by an occasional banquet off carrion, has proved in the end a more satisfactory course for the tenrec. An extraordinary fact about this creature is that it is extremely prolific, the female tenrec producing as many as twenty-one young ones at a birth.

THE DIAMONDS.

By R. RAMSAY.

I.



MAISIE was watching her aunt's departure.

The horse had been harnessed all in a hurry, and a strap hung unbuckled as it plunged and started.

Above the wheels Lady Mary sat, clutching the telegram, her wizened face peering under a bonnet that was awry. There had been an accident of some kind to Sandy.

Invariably on the day after the county ball Lady Mary carried her diamonds in to the bank, and left them till the day came round, or till there was another great entertainment. Two lone women and a few servants could hardly keep safe the jewels that were—with her pedigree—almost all the inheritance of the last Earl's daughter. It was fine to see her thin figure glitter in them, annihilating the new and rich; but she endured many terrors while they were beneath her ill-guarded roof. Yet the horse's head was turned away from the town road this morning, towards the junction across the moors; the mistress must catch the south train to Sandy—Sandy, who was the son of her dead sister, and a scamp.

Maisie saw her aunt off, and turned back to the house, its lonely mistress; and there she was confronted by a pair of excited maids. They had found three hard black cases under Lady Mary's pillow. For the first time in all her life, Lady Mary had forgotten the diamonds.

Now, the county ball was always followed by a

servants' ball the day after. Lady Mary took a pride in sending as many retainers as possible, to match the array from bigger but less ancient houses. It was a point of honour with her as much as her own appearance.

'Do you think my lady would wish us to stay away?' the butler had said reluctantly, and Maisie had said she thought not. That was why silence and a comparative loneliness fell with the evening all about the house.

Maisie flung down the book at which she had been vainly staring, and played a waltz; then she rang for lights, and there was no answer. She made her way towards the servants' quarters, venturing down the long passage softly, and pausing at last to laugh.

There was the cook—stout, red-faced, and middle-aged—twirling slowly about the kitchen in a solitary waltz; and there was the butler's underling writing poetry, with heart-broken intensity, at the table. He looked up and sighed, and the cook sighed also; and then they jumped, catching sight of Maisie.

'It's that wicked old Andrew, Miss Maisie, ma'am,' said the cook, full of her wrongs. 'Him—at his age!—off to the ball with the rest of them, and John and me left alone!' Then she heaved another lamentable sigh.

Maisie was a thing of impulse; their forlorn looks appealed to her comic and tragic side.

'It's too bad,' she said; 'but I don't want either of you, Sarah. Get ready and go after them.'

Sarah was not an old servant, like the heartless Andrew, whose chief joy was in flaunting the glories of his 'family.' She jumped at the offer with only a faint protest:

'But, Miss Maisie, you couldn't be left alone.'

'I'll bar the doors,' said Maisie.

For a little while she amused herself with the half-guilty alacrity of the two, and their struggles to harness the only animal in the stable. She saw them depart, and imagined the high wrath of Andrew, and how Lady Mary would gasp at the bare idea of her being left alone. It was a rash kind-heartedness on her part; but Maisie was amused, and did not yet repent.

It was curious how silent the house became because of the simple knowledge that she was alone in it. It was lucky she was not afraid of ghosts. She fastened all the bars she could find or manipulate, and then went wandering up the stairs. All the shutters were closed; only in Lady Mary's room one had slipped from the bar and was hanging, clanking. Maisie put down her candle and reached out of the window to pull it shut.

It was a fine night. The moon was driving restlessly through the clouds, and stars were twinkling here and there fitfully. Across the glen, where the pines darkened and there was a rush of water leaping white and sudden among the firs, something stirred like a living shadow.

Maisie started back, drawing in the clanking shutter. She heard the distant thunder of the waterfall, and it reminded her— But she was always angry when she caught herself thinking of Mr Fidler. He had been among them half the summer, an American and a stranger. They might have liked him. He was tall and earnest, with a young face and a queer straightforwardness of address; but the cause of his being there made them all feel bitter. Not the cause of his idling at all. He was an engineer, and had had an accident; the doctors had said he must idle all the summer; but why had he come to idle in this strange place?

People had puzzled over it at first, not liking to ask him, imitating his own directness; but when he first saw the waterfall there was a curious light in his eyes. He gazed at it thoughtfully—like an artist—and sighed, 'What a waste of water!'

Then he had confessed that his firm had asked him to have a look at the waterfall. It was famous; and fame, alas! is a curse. His representations might result in their buying it and diverting the water to turn their wheels. Maisie remembered the horror with which they had all heard that.

Afterwards Mr Fidler had been regarded coldly, almost with abhorrence, by the natives of Inverkill; and when at last he was leaving, Maisie had attempted a last and valiant trial of strength in argument—ah! who could convince a

wretch with a grim sense of duty and none of the picturesque?—and had cried after him in despair: 'You deserve to be haunted for ever by the gray ghost of the waterfall!'

The American had answered quietly, straightforwardly, glancing up with a queer hint of meaning from the unlucky waters to the girl defending them—Maisie was tall and slight like a reed, with an eager face in a ring of sun-golden hair:

'Miss Maisie, I shall be haunted.'

That was why Maisie was angry and reddened and caught her breath.

She fastened the shutter all in a hurry, and by way of distraction peered inside one of the hard black cases that had been thrust again under Lady Mary's pillow. The diamonds were irresistible, with their glitter of hidden stars; and Maisie was fascinated. She lifted them up and tried them audaciously on her bosom and in her hair. Half their charm had been that she only saw them in rare glimpses, and she imagined Lady Mary's shudder with a wilful laugh, lifting them up in her careless hands. Sandy had asked why his aunt did not sell them, since she lived narrowly on her income and had to pinch; but it was only Sandy who could say it and be forgiven. It was rumoured that the man at the bank had grown gray with the care of them year by year.

Maisie had lit the candles at the mirror; she put her face near it, gazing wistfully, and then retreated a little, amazed at the way she sparkled—if it were she indeed! At first she stared at herself in a rapture, and then she sighed.

What was that?

Across the utter silence came a strange, muffled clank. Maisie shrank back and listened. Who should be asking for admittance at this ominous time of night?

There was a pause in which she heard her heart beat faster and faster, in terrified expectation; and then it began again, loud and startling. Who was it? And why? She must go down and ask.

Catching up the candle from the dressing-table, she ventured to descend the stair. It wanted all her courage; she had not guessed till then what it meant to be alone—all alone—in the darkness, and in a deserted house.

The knocking had ceased when she reached the hall, but there was a strange sound of fumbling at a window hidden away behind, the one little window where the shutter-bar was not firm. Maisie remembered with dismay how the thing had swung as she tried to make it secure. The diamonds were still glittering in her hair; in her panic she had not the wit to strip them off and hide them. Desperately she started forward.

Where lonely women in towns keep a man's hat hanging to scare intruders, Lady Mary had a gun; it hung threateningly across the hat-stand, and there was a tradition that it was loaded.

Maisie clutched at it—if the thief were only half as afraid of the thing as she!—and, thus armed, approached the window.

'Who's there?' she called, and breathlessly put her finger on the trigger.

'Miss Maisie?'

She let the gun fall.

'I must come in. Don't be alarmed; but it's important,' said the voice. 'Never mind the door; perhaps better not unbar it.' Then, like a thief, Mr Fidler made his way in at the window.

'If I'd shot you!' cried Maisie, horror-stricken. The American smiled as he took the ancient weapon out of her hands, and examined it in the light of the candle that was flickering wildly near.

'It won't help us much,' he said; and then, with an odd formality in his manner, 'I must apologise for intruding; but—your aunt's diamonds didn't go to the bank?'

'N—no,' answered Maisie.

'And you're almost alone?'

'I am alone,' she said, staring at him.

'Thought so,' said Mr Fidler. 'Wait till I fix up that window.'

'I don't understand,' said Maisie, half in terror, half struggling to be haughty. Mr Fidler did not turn; she could only watch his back and the black head bent at the window.

'Well,' he said, 'it's thieves. I—I was taking a last look round, and it just happened that I was standing there in the glen, reckoning up how many thousand horse-power there is in that water'—there was a spark of mischief in his tone—'and, generally, thinking. The fellows guessed their whispering would be drowned by the noise of the waterfall, but when a man's had to live his life in the roar of machinery his ears get sharp. I just stood aside and listened. They've had their eye on Lady Mary's movements; and it's the diamonds! So I slipped away among the firs like a snake, and sent a man I ran across on the way here to fetch help; but it will be an hour before that reaches us—and they're coming along at once.'

He turned then and looked at Maisie. The candle flickered near both their faces as he lifted it.

'Look here,' he said; 'you shut yourself in somewhere, and leave me to run this show.'

'I won't,' said Maisie.

'Please,' he said; and then quickly, 'you've got them on—haven't you?'

She remembered all at once that she was still wearing the diamonds.

'Take them off,' he said quietly. It did not seem to surprise him that she should be masquerading in the precious things that should have been hidden away under lock and key, but he spoke as if she were a careless child. 'I'll take charge of them for the present. They will be safer in my pockets.'

Maisie was dumb. A terrible doubt assailed her and darkened her trust in him. After all, he was a stranger. How did she know? For an instant she felt that she would far, far rather have seen a real burglar, a ruffianly villain whom there could be no mistaking. A man like that might kill her, but—but could not break her heart.

He watched her, a strange little figure, with the diamonds sparkling like fire and stars, her face wan and young and terrified in the glitter.

'Why,' he said, with a queer, short laugh—had he read the fear in her eyes?—'I believe you think I'm a thief!'

Maisie looked him right in the face; then she put the diamonds in his hands.

II.



HERE was no sound without, surely?

Yet what was that creeping, creeping?

Was it nothing but restless leaves?

Maisie, standing at the bottom of the stairs, came involuntarily closer to Mr Fidler and laid her hand on his arm.

'Is it?'—she whispered.

He did not answer directly; he was listening. When he did speak it was with a cheerful irrelevance.

'Are there any tea-trays?'

'What?' asked Maisie.

'I'm not particular,' said Mr Fidler. 'Anything you can bang will do.'

Maisie led the way to the kitchen, where they could arm themselves with brass trays and anything else resounding.

'Now, what we have to do,' Mr Fidler said quietly, 'is to wait till they are close up, and then scare them out of their lives. It will gain time.'

Then they waited.

Slowly the sounds, that were hardly sounds, came nearer; the night seemed to be intense with an unaccountable restlessness, as if there were a fear in the rustle of every leaf.

'Cover the light,' said Mr Fidler; 'they might see it through the shutters.'

Maisie hid it behind the stair, and came back to him, her eyes large with expectation. They could just distinguish each other's faces.

'I'll give the word,' he whispered.

Maisie shuddered. Alone she would never venture to break the hush fraught with expectation—with such a threat. If she had been alone still she would surely have died!

'Oh!' she gasped. Then she felt his fingers close over hers.

What was that narrow gleam of light in the darkness? It did not come from within.

'Now!'

Then the night was made hideous by a sudden appalling clamour.

The girl's strained ears could catch nothing in that terrible brazen clang. Mechanically she beat the brass pans around her, kneeling among them, gazing with dilated eyes up at him. Her hands ached; she caught up something and hammered with it upon the rest. It was like a nightmare.

Mr Fidler was standing opposite, solemnly banging two large brass trays against each other till the roof rang again. He looked across at her and smiled. Must they go on for ever? She tried to ask, but her voice was inaudible in the din, and he could not see her parted lips in the eerie light that glimmered so strangely among the brass.

At last he paused. Maisie imitated him, letting her hands fall and shuddering in the utter silence. He was listening. A minute passed—another, and then another.

'I'm afraid,' he said 'that the trays are dented.'

He had meant to make her laugh, and she had to, although her ears were ringing and her eyes wild with fear; it gave her courage to ask what was faltering on her lips.

'Are they gone?' she said.

'Well,' said Mr Fidler thoughtfully, 'I guess they are making up their minds about the brass band a few hundred yards away. If they think it's the devil—excuse me—they will run farther.'

'And if not?' breathed Maisie.

Mr Fidler smiled at her in a calm, unexcited manner.

'Then it won't last,' he said.

'You mean?'—faltered Maisie.

'I mean when a man's scared they say the blood leaves his heart and makes him an awful coward; and then, I expect, it rushes back in a hurry and makes him reckless. It's hard to beat a man who's been thoroughly frightened and got over it. That's why some soldiers fight like fiends. Anyway, we've gained time.'

There was a little pause; they listened, with their eyes on each other. Then the American turned to Maisie; she had not heard a sound.

'Oblige me,' he said. 'Take those things back to the pantry and—stay there. It has a good lock, and patent bars on the window. I shall be much more comfortable if you will.'

'Am I to shut myself in and try to go to sleep?' said Maisie, her eyes dark with scorn. It thrilled above the fear in her voice, vanquishing it for a while.

'Just that,' he said.

'I won't,' she declared, looking at him defiantly, all the while her heart beating fast in terror.

'Ah! but you must,' said the American pleadingly. He had taken up the ancient gun with which Maisie had tried to withstand him when he arrived, and was examining it with a kind of hopeless amusement. 'Don't think I'm in any danger,' he said. 'If they turn up I shall threaten them and talk big. How are they to know I'm not a squad of police? If they get a

glimpse of *this* they'll take to their heels at once.' He looked up suddenly from the gun, and his eyes were earnest. 'Miss Maisie, I'm a lucky man. I was telling myself I'd never see you again. I was telling myself I'd never have a chance to serve you—I who would give my life for the opportunity. So, you see, I'm happy. Won't you go away?'

The girl's heart gave a little leap; but *she* could not fight: it would only hamper him to have her at his side; and—and—he was talking as if it were a simple fact, needing no comment, that he loved her, and she knew it, and did not care. That was strangely betrayed in his tone, and in the smile with which he was putting it all aside.

'I'll go,' said Maisie, a queer gaiety hiding the little shake in her voice. 'I'll go up, and lean over the stair, and watch!'

He smiled again; this time the smile was hurried.

'Go,' he said. 'Right up to the roof, and look out like Sister Anne'—

Crack!

The light wavered suddenly in the vibrating air, and then Mr Fidler staggered and fell backwards among the brass pans with a muffled clang. Then he lay still.

Maisie's cry rang above the jarring noise of his fall:

'They've killed him! Oh, they've killed him!'

And there was nothing that could matter much after that.

The men, thrusting their way in past the broken shutters, glanced without pity at the figures on the floor. It had been a lucky shot, thanks to the crack under the shutter. Had it hit them both? The men were not curious; in their trade there is small leisure for a curiosity that is idle. The house was at their mercy; its two defenders, a man and a girl, were both unconscious. That was all they cared about. Time was short.

'Bring that,' said one shortly, turning back at the stair-foot and indicating the light, shining dimly where Maisie had placed it a little while ago. The man who had shot Mr Fidler paused, put down his revolver, and caught up the light, sheltering it with his other hand from the draught of the shattered window. Then they all disappeared up the stair.

Maisie had never fainted before; it was only a minute's blank. She felt the life returning, and was in darkness.

It was all strange and silent. Only, far away in the upper parts of the house there was a sound of walking—weird, muffled, like the horrible wandering of ghosts. Maisie's head was resting against something that was very still; her arm was flung round it as she had fallen.

'They've killed him!' she moaned. 'They've killed him! Oh God! Oh God!'

Then she felt the quick beat of a pulse underneath her cheek in the darkness, and a hand moved strangely, softly, across her hair.

'Maisie!'

That was how they found each other.

'It was falling among the brass band that stunned me,' he said. 'I'm only shot in the ankle.'

Maisie could only sob.

'I'm all right, only'—He paused anxiously, listening to the distant searching, and then he spoke again, in a hurried whisper: 'Take the diamonds out of my pocket and run, straight through the wood. You'll meet the men coming; and it's the only way'—

'Leave you?'

Mr Fidler peered round the deserted hall. The moon had burst an instant through the clouds that were hiding it, and glimmered in at the shattered window. It lit things in the darkness fitfully, with a capricious gleam; and he saw the revolver lying where the light had been. He struggled up and tried to walk towards it, but failed.

'Will you reach me that?' he asked.

Maisie lifted it, shuddering.

'Thanks. Six chambers, and I had the first. Maisie, Maisie, take the things and run'—

'I will not,' she said. He leaned against the wall, white with pain, in the darkness; and yet he smiled.

'The diamonds!'

'The diamonds!' repeated Maisie, with an utter disdain that was great in a woman. 'Why, if they can't find them—if they are gone—they will—murder you!'

'Hush!' he whispered; his hand on her arm was urging her towards the window. 'I think I will sit up and pepper them as they come down the stairs.'

Maisie started, with a dreadful vision of what might happen.

'I'll run,' she gasped.

Her hand tightened in his and then let go. It would mean saving him, if she could reach the tardy rescuers in time. Ah! she could run for that. Now the thieves were inside, the way was perhaps unguarded. Only, if she came back too late? There was no other chance, unless—

'Give me the diamonds,' she said hurriedly.

There was something strange in her tone. The American, who had himself proposed it, drew back his hand; then, finding her fingers eagerly fumbling at his pockets, he caught them and held them fast. He smiled down on her tenderly, triumphantly, in the imminent peril they both were in.

'No,' he said. 'I understand. You've no right to take them and give them up as a peace-offering to the thieves. They belong to your aunt. Would she like it?'

Then Maisie went.

She dared not unfasten the door. Treading with a desperate lightness, she reached the window and thrust herself through as the burglars had done, falling on to the grass. In another minute she was a wild running shadow among the trees.

Had she been running all her life in a breathless night? Or was it an awful dream? Flying in moonlight and blackness alike, careless of anything that might hurt or stay, Maisie strained her eyes to catch sight of the dark human figures that started up in her road at last.

'Quick!' she cried. 'Quick!'

They stared at the apparition, grasping its significance as she dragged at them to make them hurry. There were several men, gathered from distant farms, and a few were riding. A man lifted Maisie up to his saddle, and she felt the horse leap beneath her. Ah! would they be in time?

As they reached the house they heard a pistol-shot, then another.

Maisie shut her hands over her ears. She saw nothing but a strange glimmer of lights and darkness, and the lights were flashes, terrible and brief. The men rushed past her. There was a struggle now, a fierce fight, and then—capture. She watched it in a terrified search for the one face among them all.

At last she saw him, and sprang to his side as he staggered. He had been resting on one foot, leaning against the wall.

'They've only hit me twice,' he said, and laughed.

Lady Mary returned in the morning. It had been a hoax about Sandy—a ruse perhaps—and strange intelligence buzzed in her ears all the way. She rushed at Maisie, and her first shriek was for the diamonds.

'Mr Fidler stole them, I think,' said Maisie. 'I don't know if they are still in his pocket'—her face, that had been wan with excitement and fear and watching, had no longer a want of colour—'and—and—he has stolen me.'

CHRISTMAS.

REJOICE! for Christmas Eve is here once more,
With all its charm of mirth and Eastern lore.
Although you see no star not seen before,
Nor laden Magi wending by your door;

Although two thousand years have almost passed
Since in the fields, that dim and distant night,
The shepherds saw the herald-angel bright,
And mystic music heard from heights downcast:

Pile up the fire, spread forth the festal board,
Dig out the roadway from the drifted snow,
And bring in holly, bay, and mistletoe,
That we may keep the birthday of our Lord.

Rejoice! I trust Joy, Peace, and Love will be
Among the guests who share the feast with thee.

SARAH WILSON.